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SUBJECT: UBCV PATRIARCH "PREVENTED" FROM TRAVELING TO HCMC

REF: 06 HCMC 1115

¶1. (U) On January 4, the International Buddhist Information Bureau (IBIB), the Paris-based mouthpiece for the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) announced that UBCV Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang was prevented from returning to HCMC for a medical check up. Thich Huyen Quang returned to Binh Dinh province in Central Vietnam in mid-November from HCMC after spending over six weeks hospitalized for medical treatment (reftel). A Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman denied the IBIB allegation.

¶2. (SBU) On January 5, we spoke with UBCV contacts in HCMC and Binh Dinh province, who noted that GVN authorities did not specifically prohibit the Patriarch from traveling, but stated in several meetings with Thich Huyen Quang that he "should not" travel to HCMC. The officials argued that his medical condition is stable and can be treated adequately locally. The officials reportedly added that his travel would not be "convenient" for security reasons. The UBCV confirmed that the Binh Dinh hospital has sent doctors to check up on the Patriarch "for time to time."

¶3. (SBU) Based on this implicit warning that there could be a confrontation should he decide to travel, Thich Huyen Quang decided to forgo a return to HCMC for the present time. That said, he plans to seek to travel to HCMC in late February after Tet (the Lunar New Year). According to Thich Huyen Quang's assistant in Binh Dinh, the patriarch's health is stable and he continues to follow the treatment regimen prescribed by a private HCMC hospital.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Quang and the UBCV used his six-week stay in HCMC in 2006 to test the limits of GVN control of the UBCV. Quang held a series of bedside meetings, not just with UBCV General Secretary Thich Quang Do and other senior UBCV leaders, but also with prominent political dissidents such as Democratic Party of Vietnam Deputy General Secretary Tran Khue. It is not surprising, therefore, that the GVN would seek to prevent the UBCV from "making routine" such visits. However, were Quang's health to deteriorate again, the GVN almost certainly would facilitate the patriarch's travel to HCMC for treatment.
End Comment.

WINNICK